

IV. Amendment to the Claims

Claims 1-21 are pending in the present application. Claims 1, 4, 8, 11 and 14 are amended as set forth below. Claims 2 and 3 and 9 and 10 have been canceled. New Claims 22-24 have been added, examination of which are requested. This listing and version of the claims replaces all prior listings and versions of the claims.

1. A post cladding element, comprising:

a one-piece elongated tubular flexible body having first and second opposing longitudinal edges and a continuous seam closure formed along said body and defined at said first and second opposing longitudinal edges of said flexible body, whereby a post may be clad by flexing said body to open said seam closure a sufficient width to dispose said flexible body around said post, wherein said seam closure comprises a female connector and a male connector disposed to mate with each other, whereby said opposing longitudinal edges are mated,

wherein an outer surface of said flexible body includes an ornamental configuration, and

wherein said male and female connectors cooperate to camouflage or hide said seam closure into said ornamental configuration.

2. (canceled)

3. (canceled)

4. (currently amended) The post cladding element of claim 1, wherein said male and female connectors include a retention latch or barb.

5. (original) The post cladding element of claim 1, wherein said tubular flexible body comprises PVC.

6. (original) The post cladding element of claim 1, wherein an opening formed with said width is at least about the length of the smallest interior dimension of said post cladding element when said continuous seam closure is fully closed.

7. (original) The post cladding element of claim 1, wherein an opening formed with said width is less than the length of the smallest interior dimension of said post cladding element when said continuous seam closure is fully closed, whereby said flexible body is slipped over said post from a top or bottom end of said post.

8. (currently amended) A method of cladding a post, comprising the following steps:

providing a one-piece elongated tubular flexible body having first and second opposing longitudinal edges and a continuous seam closure formed along said body and defined at said first and second opposing longitudinal edges of said flexible body; and

flexing said body to open said seam closure a sufficient width to permit disposal of said body completely around said post,

wherein said seam closure includes a female connector and a male connector disposed to mate with each other, said method further comprising the step of mating said female and male connectors after said flexing step to mate said opposing longitudinal edges,

wherein an outer surface of said flexible body includes an ornamental configuration, and

wherein said male and female connectors cooperate to camouflage or hide said seam closure into said ornamental configuration.

9. (canceled)

10. (canceled)

11. (currently amended) The method of claim ~~10~~ 8, further comprising the step of disposing a plurality of fasteners through a portion of said female connector and into said post, wherein said male connector is disposed to cover said fasteners.

12. (original) The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of applying a decorative molding proximate to a top or bottom portion of said body.

13. (original) The method of claim 8, wherein said post is a pre-installed post.

14. (currently amended) The method of claim 9 ~~8~~, wherein an opening formed during said flexing step with said width is at least about the length of the smallest interior dimension of said post cladding element when said continuous seam closure is fully closed.

15. (original) The method of claim 8, wherein an opening formed during said flexing step with said width is less than the length of the smallest interior dimension of said post cladding element when said continuous seam closure is fully closed, wherein said flexible body is slipped over said post from a top or bottom end of said post.

16. (original) A method of forming a cladding element comprising the steps of:

extruding an elongated tubular flexible body, said flexible body having a male connector and a female connector formed integrally therewith and connected to each other by an integral linking portion;

cutting said linking portion to form a post cladding element having first and second opposing longitudinal edges and a continuous seam closure formed longitudinally along said body and defined at said first and second opposing longitudinal edges of said flexible body, said longitudinal edges including said male connector and female connector, which are freed by said cutting step, and

whereby a post may be clad by flexing said body to open said seam closure a sufficient width to dispose said flexible body around said post.

17. (original) The method of claim 16,

wherein an outer surface of said flexible body includes an ornamental configuration, and

wherein said male and female connectors cooperate to camouflage or hide said seam closure into said ornamental configuration.

18. (original) The method of claim 16, wherein said cutting step includes the step of removing said linking portion.

19. (original) The method of claim 16, wherein said cutting step is in-line with an extrusion process including said extruding step.

20. (original) The method of claim 16, wherein said cutting step is performed during installation of said cladding element.

21. (original) A post cladding element comprising:

an elongated tubular flexible body, said flexible body having a male connector and a female connector formed integrally therewith and connected to each other by an integral linking portion, wherein cutting said linking portion forms a post cladding element having first and second opposing longitudinal edges and a continuous seam closure formed longitudinally along said body and defined at said first and second opposing longitudinal edges of said flexible body, said longitudinal edges including said male connector and female connector, which are freed by cutting said linking portion, whereby a post may be clad by flexing said body to open said seam closure a sufficient width to dispose said flexible body around said post.

22. (new) The post cladding element of claim 1, wherein said female connector comprises a U-shaped slot disposed at said first longitudinal edge and facing said second longitudinal edge to receive said male connector.

23. (new) The method of claim 8, wherein said female connector comprises a U-shaped slot disposed at said first longitudinal edge and facing said second longitudinal edge to receive said male connector.

24. (new) A cladded post assembly, comprising:

a vertically oriented post member; and

a post cladding element, said post cladding element comprising:

a one-piece elongated tubular flexible body having first and second opposing longitudinal edges and a continuous seam closure formed along said body and defined at said first and second opposing longitudinal edges of said flexible body, said post cladding element disposed around said post member by flexing said body to open said seam closure a sufficient width to dispose said flexible body around said post member,

wherein said seam closure comprises a female connector and a male connector disposed to mate with each other, whereby said opposing longitudinal edges are mated,

wherein an outer surface of said flexible body includes an ornamental configuration, and

wherein said male and female connectors cooperate to camouflage or hide said seam closure into said ornamental configuration.